



AGCAS Response to Lambert Review

AGCAS is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Lambert Review. We note that there does seem to be quite a bit of overlap between it and the Higher Education & Business section of the DfES White Paper. We know that the DfES particularly emphasises the importance of joined-up government, so we wish to stress that the findings of both consultations should be looked at together.

Background

AGCAS, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, was founded in 1967 as the professional association for Careers Services within higher education institutions throughout the UK and Ireland. Since that time, AGCAS has provided leadership and support to its member services in their main tasks of providing careers information, guidance and education to students and graduates and facilitating links between them and potential employers. HE Careers Services regard employers as one of their main customers or target groups and because most AGCAS Services have now been established for over thirty years, they have long-standing relationships and links with employers at local, regional, national and international levels. AGCAS, AGR, the Association of Graduate Recruiters, and NUS, the National Union of Students, have a well-established joint Code “Best Practice in Graduate Recruitment”. As a consequence of these long term relationships, we believe that HE Careers Services provide an excellent example of higher education and businesses working together in the interests of the economy, business / industry and of individual students and graduates.

All AGCAS Services have a website and these provide a clear route for employers and others to access the relevant services provided. These sites can be accessed via the link to members on the AGCAS website www.agcas.org.uk. Examples of different approaches to employers through their websites include the Careers Services in the following Universities: Aston, Bath, Bristol, Derby, London, Oxford, Robert Gordon, Sheffield, Strathclyde and Swansea.

AGCAS and its member services work closely with CSU (the Higher Education Careers Services Unit) to produce comprehensive and up-to-date careers information and guidance, based on wide-ranging research into graduate occupations and the labour market. These are available in a variety of formats and through www.prospects.ac.uk.

The main aim of AGCAS services is to enable students to access the appropriate information and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to implement their career choices both immediately after graduation and thereafter. These activities are carried out in a variety of ways as best fits the needs of the students and the institutions which they serve, but all include the provision of a range of services to employers. In recognition of the importance of high quality information, advice and guidance on work and learning opportunities in supporting social inclusion and increasing the value of human capital throughout the UK, AGCAS adopted the matrix quality standard in 2002 and aims to have all its services accredited by the Guidance Accreditation Board by the end of 2005.

Many of the successful business/university relationships have been built up over a considerable period of time. This is particularly true in the graduate recruitment area.

Issues

AGCAS recognises that the focus of the Lambert Review is wider than the **recruitment and retention of high quality graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills and their successful transition into the world of work**, but nevertheless we would argue that this is one of the major ways in which higher education serves and benefits business and the economy.

There is no doubt that **more could be done to convince business of the necessity for and benefits of greater interaction with higher education**. This is often most necessary in the case of SMEs which have least time, resource and previous experience of such links to understand the benefits or to take advantage of them. Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils can support such interactions by providing a supportive infrastructure and funding for valuable work already being done eg. through STEP <http://www.step.org.uk/> or the National Council for Work Experience. www.work-experience.org or current regional HEI initiatives.

There do **need to be more effective channels so that business employers can better communicate their skills requirements to a responsive university sector, but there also needs to be recognition that there is no unanimity amongst employers about what they want**. It is important to recognise a unique feature of the UK graduate recruitment market namely that for the majority of posts, employers don't care what degree subject undergraduates have studied. In relation to the needs of industry, there have already been a number of publications over the last 5 years informing universities about the needs of industry. **What is required in addition, is a mechanism to explain the complexities, challenges and changes within higher education to employers**

Furthermore, the time lag of about five years between setting up a course and the first graduates entering employment may just be long enough for a complete reversal in patterns of demand. The 1980s and 1990s saw several examples of this. The problem of how employers can improve the attractiveness of career paths to graduates and postgraduates, especially in technology is also complex. **Analysis of patterns of student demand for HE courses shows that it is often in inverse proportion to the supply of jobs in that field**. Influencing the aspirations and expectations of HE applicants is, as the White Paper readily acknowledges, a complex task and one which has to begin in schools.

Student behaviour, when it comes to choosing career options, is changing rapidly too. **Evidence is growing that more and more students are delaying career choice and job-hunting till after graduation**. Career decisions are influenced by a wide range of factors and constraints, not all linked to the choice of subject studied. A recent study by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) of career choices of graduates in the South West of England illustrated a new typology reflecting the geographical mobility of new graduates.

Careers Services have an important role in the HE sector as ambassadors for their institutions in relation to employers, acting as a conduit between graduate recruiters and their institutions. In the best examples, mechanisms exist so that the knowledge and insights of Careers Service staff are capitalised on and employers' needs can be conveyed to curriculum designers and Careers Service input is actively sought by course design teams.

A important issue for many universities is the problem of co-ordinating employer-related activity across the University. While AGCAS recognises the many different kinds of links which exist, it believes that at the very least there is a need for a

single / or shared database (s) of the institutions' employer contacts (and vice-versa). In many institutions the Careers Service, External Relations, Research and Consultancy, Continuing Education and the International Divisions as well as the majority of academic departments are in contact with businesses / employers on a regular basis. In both cases links will naturally be with different parts of the organisation, but there is a need for each organisation to have an overview.

AGCAS Services can provide many examples of excellence and best practice in business-university collaboration across the UK as demonstrated by the case studies which illustrate this response.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

1) We would like to identify best practice and examples of excellence in business-university collaboration in the UK and abroad. Some examples of the types of collaboration that we would be interested in hearing about include:

- ***Joint ventures between universities and business, for example, personnel exchange or collaborative research and development projects.***

AGCAS and AGR (the Association of Graduate Recruiters) are developing an imaginative secondment scheme to bring employers and careers staff closer together and allow each to gain an insight and appreciation of the other's role, through undertaking short-term placements (from 5 –15 days) in the other sector.

AGCAS Services are often involved in research projects, particularly those conducted by IER (Institute for Employment Research) and IES (Institute for Employment Studies) or commissioned by .CSU

Several Universities have wide-ranging partnerships with specific companies and work together with them on research, knowledge transfer and recruitment.

- ***Informal meetings and conferences, use of science parks, business-university liaison, industry sponsored university posts or studentships, work experience for students, business contributions to curriculum development, academic secondments in industry and provision of continuing professional development training by universities for business.***

Informal meetings and conferences

For many years there have been Careers Adviser visits to employers and employers have visited University campuses for a variety of purposes including recruitment interviews. Changes in the patterns of recruitment (on-line procedures and fewer campus interviews) mean that new ways of retaining personal as well as correspondence contacts need to be found.

Both AGCAS and AGR invite each others members to their Conferences both as speakers and as participants. This helps both groups to keep up to date.

A few Careers Services are members of their local Chamber of Commerce or of AGR while others attend local Business Fairs.

Business - University Liaison

The work of HE Careers Services should be viewed as an important form of on-going Business – University liaison.

HE Careers Services generally work with employers in a variety of ways. The following examples give a good indication of the range.

Case Study - [The University of Reading](#)

The Careers Service:

- provides a recruitment service for employers that includes, running fairs, advertising vacancies, holding recruitment presentations and interviews on campus and advising employers on recruitment strategies
- involves employers in delivering careers education through careers events and career management skills in the curriculum
- involves employers in advising, reviewing and helping to set the strategic direction for the work of the CAS through membership of the Careers Advisory Board, the Career Management Skills Implementation Task Group and the Employers Forum
- lists local employers in a database that enables them to receive speculative applications from students seeking graduate vacancies or work experience placements
- provides local employers with the opportunity to advertise local temporary and part-time work through its JobShop
- offers staff development training to local employers through the local, Information, Advice and Guidance Network using the Myers Briggs Type Inventory

Careers Service Boards

Many pre- 1992 Universities have Careers Service Boards with representation from employers and other external stakeholders as well as students, University management and academic staff to foster an effective relationship with recruiters of graduates. These are important in the communication between the institution and business because although many employers liaise directly with the Careers Service, for their voice to have an impact on the curriculum it is valuable for them also to meet directly with a wider spectrum of academic and management colleagues. However, these Boards must be purposeful and productive.

Proactive and commercial employer liaison

Many HE Careers Services have established specific posts to deal with employer liaison and have found innovative ways of attracting employer interest in their students and graduates. The targeting of many large companies' recruitment activities makes this task even more challenging in new universities.

Case Study – University of Warwick

The Careers Service has developed a strong employer liaison function to support the needs of employers who wish to target its students. A recent study commissioned by AGR from Barkers found that the Warwick Service was among the top five Careers Services favoured by recruiters for providing an effective means of promoting their vacancies to students. The team is led by a marketing professional with a background in education and recruitment consultancy, enabling the Careers Service to provide businesses to business standards within a proactive commercial culture.

The free core service ensures an efficient conduit of vacancy information from local and national recruiters to students and graduates. In addition to this, employers are offered a portfolio of priced services that allow those recruiters that wish it to be more targeted in their marketing, e.g. bespoke email shots to specific sectors of the student body. The Service also conducts and commissions market research on the student body on behalf of the members of the recruiters club. The priced services are self-financing and support the capacity to develop and market not-for profit services to employers and to extend the support for students.

Recruiters Forum

A number of institutions have set up specific events to promote their services to recruiting organisations and to update recruiters on skills development and enhancement activities for students. A pioneering event, attended by about two dozen recruiting organisations and hosted by the University of Warwick in London was, they believe, the first time a Vice Chancellor had initiated an open discussion with recruiters of graduates concerning the qualities sought from recruits from higher education. A further Science and Engineering Forum is planned for Summer 2003

focussing on recruiters of Science and Engineering students to explore what more could be done to attract students to consider a career in science and engineering, to explore the role of work experience in the learning programme. However it must be recognised that this sort of initiative is easier for those institutions targeted by employers than for others and is another area where regional collaboration could be valuable.

Case Study – University of Cambridge

The Careers Service has an active Employers Group with 130 employer members from a variety of sectors. We organise a series of annual sector meetings which enable us to discuss issues of common concern and to bring employers views back to our students and, where appropriate, to the wider Cambridge University community. These meetings also include presentations on developments and opportunities within the University which are of interest to the employers attending, such as 'Working with academic departments', the 'MIT-Cambridge initiative' and descriptions of specific courses.

Bringing together academics with staff in SMEs

One of the most successful ways this has been done is through the Teaching Company Scheme. SMEs have to see an immediate benefit arising from their links with higher education otherwise it is unlikely to remain high up their priority lists.

Case Study - Cardiff University

Cardiff University launched the Innovation Network in March 1996 as a way of bringing together academics with staff in SMEs to exchange information and discuss technology transfer. Small companies are put in contact with academic staff and other relevant organisations to help solve business problems. In addition, 6 - 8 evening meetings take place each year which are well attended with guest speakers talking about topics relevant to the audience e.g. securing new inventions /processes with patents; change management; financial support from the WDA and other organisations for local businesses. A database of over 1,000 companies has been set up which facilitates contact between these companies and the University. The Director of the Careers Service usually attend these evening meetings to promote the Careers Service support for employers in terms of work experience, graduate vacancies handling and skills development.

Work Experience for students

There has been a strong focus on the development of work experience opportunities for students in recent years. Long-established schemes like the STEP Programme have played an important part, but bearing in mind the huge expansion in HE over the last ten years and more, there is a vast demand for more employers to offer a wide range of opportunities for students to develop their skills and business awareness. **Many employers who demand or desire work-experience in their applicants, do not themselves offer any. This balance needs to be redressed.**

Case Study - University of Leeds

Leeds is probably unusual in the sense that student placement is an explicit feature of the University's Knowledge Transfer Strategy: "Introduce a mechanism in the Careers Centre for coordinating student placements across the University" (www.leeds.ac.uk/about/stratplan/knowledge.htm). Whilst this is plainly a learning and teaching matter as well, there is a clear and unequivocal business support element to work experience as far as the University of Leeds is concerned.

The University now has the capacity to offer businesses the complete range of student placement possibilities ranging from hiring students for a few hours per week for part time jobs, through Joblink (a joint venture between the University Careers Centre and the Student Union) through short projects and internships to full sandwich year placements. A number of departments have strong industrial placement programmes. Chemistry is a good example.

Student Job Shops

Most Universities now have Student Job Shops / Student Employment Services as part of their Careers Services or operated in conjunction with the Student Union as described above. These services provide access to work-based placements, vacation work as well as casual work opportunities to help students finances.

Careers Services play an important role in helping students to identify and develop their skills through such placements as well as through other aspects of their experience, increasingly working through the development of Personal Development Profiles (part of the Progress Files recommended by Dearing.)

Case Study - University of Liverpool

Work experience collaboration includes:

- 1) PULSE, which is the University's student employment service, which links local employers in need of extra hands to the student labour market, and at the same time enables students to supplement their income.
- 2) Work Based Learning is the route by which students can undertake formal projects, as part of their studies, in business rather than in the University.
- 3) Volunteering opportunities with community organisations and in schools are arranged for interested students.
- 4) Maintaining a database of 5000 employers

Case Study – Wales

The HEFCW initiative to require the HEIs in Wales to produce annual Work Experience and Employability Plans (WEEP) has been a real bonus in terms of giving employability skills a much-needed boost. These have enabled core funded posts to be established within Careers Services for work experience and employer liaison activities.

Business contributions to curriculum development

For universities to be able to hear what recruiters want, means that the influence Careers Services needs to be enhanced within institutions, involving them more in the curriculum planning stage. Curriculum planners need to be fully aware of the knowledge, skills and competences that make students employable against industry's requirements. Employers should be invited to sit on academic department/faculty Boards to influence the development of courses. This already happens in some institutions, but when those individuals who represent their companies move on, they are often not replaced by their organisation. In Wales there are good links between the professional associations and academic departments in Welsh HEIs and this has been an effective channel for them to influence curriculum design.

Case-Study - University of Liverpool

Many academic departments, particularly in the science/technology areas invite professionals from business to sit on Boards to feed into the continual updating of courses, so that programmes of study meet the needs of business.

Case Study – University of Warwick

During the spring of 2003, the university has been conducting a thorough appraisal of the undergraduate curriculum and as part of this exercise, has solicited views from recruiters of undergraduates. 14 recruiting organisations and one sector skills council attended an afternoon seminar with members of faculty responsible for the review. This symposium considered the relative merits of breadth, depth, subject-knowledge and skills in our curriculum and in employers recruiting needs. It also looked at the value of work experience and extra curricular activities in developing employability.

Career management / education modules

Very many universities now have well-established programmes, some of which are accredited and integrated into the institutions' curriculum. Career management modules run by, or in partnership with the University Careers Services often have direct employer input. These programmes are aimed at enhancing students' employability by developing their awareness of the opportunities available to them, improving their self-presentation skills and enabling them to make and implement their career choices.

Case Study – University of Cardiff

Embedding key skills into the curriculum is an important feature in the review of academic programmes at Cardiff. The Careers Management Skills (CMS) programme that the Careers Service has introduced in 17 of the 23 academic departments helps to address the issue of employability skills. One of the strands of the new graduate support programme in Wales is likely to include the development of online CMS materials, which will increase the opportunities for students to develop the necessary skills.

Case Study – University of Cambridge

Employers' observations and comments about Cambridge students have allowed the Careers Service over the last few years to introduce new sessions and events on specific skills, produce written guidance material and shape the overall content and delivery of our service. Many of these events are run by visiting employers but hosted and promoted by the Careers Service. Examples include: 'Commercial awareness', 'IT skills', 'Case study interviews', 'Financial markets' and general teamworking exercises, business games etc. We have worked closely with CRAC (Careers Research and Advisory Council) and local and national employers to run 'insight courses' for students to gain an appreciation of working in particular fields

Student Skills Competitions

Some Universities, notably Aberystwyth and Leeds organise these events which bring together large numbers of students, academics and employers to work on and compete through departmental projects aimed at developing students' work-related skills. In Aberystwyth, this has become a highlight of the institutions' calendar and its success lies in the wide participation encouraged among academic departments and employers.

- ***We would also be interested to learn how the relationship came about. Were your local Regional Development Agency or Sector Skills Council involved? What more could be done to facilitate successful partnerships?***

Regional projects and partnerships

Regional projects taking place in various forms across the UK in one form or another address many of the topics raised in the first question. It is worth stressing the need for coherence and integration both from the business side (demand) and the higher education (supply) side, since there are often pockets of useful and relevant activity taking place which are not mapped on to the overviews of either the businesses or the institutions concerned. There is an urgent need for not only regional "maps" of HE / Business related activity which are detailed and available to any (potential) partner, but

for a national “map” providing a clear picture from the demand and supply sides of the equation. Such maps would considerably help with planning and policy-making. All those involved need to know how strategy is being developed and implemented and have an opportunity to influence it.

Case Study – North-West of England

- i) All the universities in the Northwest of England are party to an on-line brokerage service to promote placements, work experience and graduate employment opportunities (particularly in SMEs) across the region. The Student and Graduate Online (SAGO) is currently funded by NWDA through the University of Manchester & UMIST Careers Service. Target sectors for the region are featured on the site, with links to many of the regions businesses.
- ii) a service primarily for SMEs (NW Business Access) in brokering relationships between them and HEI in the region to address business problems or planning (also has a pay-off for project opportunities for current students as well as for research or knowledge-transfer related).
- iii) Business Enterprise Support Team (BEST) for the promotion of self-employment, start-up enterprises etc.

Case Study -Merseyside

- 1) The Business Bridge project (funded by ERDF) seeks to help SMEs meet their business needs by enabling students to transfer higher level skills through project based work.
- 2) An "Insight into SME Management" programme is organised in conjunction with CRAC Ltd for students at the three HEIs.
- 3) Several regional graduate recruitment fairs per year are organised to facilitate businesses in every sector to recruit graduates. A Graduate to Merseyside Arena is a feature in the large Fairs to promote opportunities in the region. Other fairs target less traditional graduate opportunities.
- 4) Merseyside Diversity Mentoring run the Outlook Programme, which matches mentors from business with students from ethnic minorities or with disabilities, to improve their employability, and assist businesses in addressing their diversity concerns. This is currently supported by a charitable donation from CSU Ltd.

Case Study - University of Portsmouth

Careers Service employer liaison strategies include the following:

- 1) meeting with economic development contacts in the borough and city councils in the region (including economic regeneration contacts)
- 2) writing articles for local magazines (e.g. *The Point* in Hampshire) that is mailed directly to SME business in the region articulating the reasons for employing graduates and offering services to local employers.
- 3) Circulating promotional details through the local Chamber of Commerce about the services the University of Portsmouth offers to employers.
- 4) Provision of an on-line-vacancy and opportunity bulletin (with easy to use template) offering free advertising of vacancies and opportunities to employers.
- 5) An annual employers forum focusing upon our top 20 employers and getting feedback from them about course content and graduate skill issues.

6) Funded feasibility study (funded by South East England Development Agency) to examine the LMI requirements of HE Careers Services and utilise Skills Insight and SEEDA economic intelligence and first destination data to inform students, graduates and employers about the LMI requirements of the region.

AGCAS would like to endorse the inclusion of the Sector Skills Councils in reviews of the curriculum. Many students aspire to join smaller enterprises, the not-for-profit sectors and creative and media enterprises, organisations unlikely to have HR specialists or graduate recruitment functions but the needs of their future graduate recruits are just as significant as those of larger organisations. In the future, the Sector Skills Councils may also have an important role to play in influencing the development and relevance of undergraduate teaching and in order to do this they will need an appropriate communication and consultation mechanism.

Labour Market Information

In most HEIs the Careers Services is responsible for the collection of graduate first destination information. This provides them with an invaluable source of data about what happens to their own graduates, what kinds of organisations they join, the occupations they enter and their geographical mobility. Despite the well-rehearsed limitations of this annual exercise, it still represents the best information we have about the first destinations of new graduates. Several longitudinal surveys (most notable the “7 Years On” project) are now being undertaken of different cohorts of graduates, to identify trends and changes over time. AGCAS also has a specific task group dedicated to Graduate Labour Market issues. Institutions and employers could make better use of the data collected and analysed.

Case Study - University of Sussex

The Careers Service is conducting a Labour Market Intelligence project which will involve researching the use of LMI in HE Careers Services in the SEEDA region (South East RDA). One of the outcomes will be proposals for regional developments, perhaps on a sub-regional basis funded by SEEDA and carried out on behalf of SEARCH (the South East Region group of Heads of HE Careers Services). A researcher will be based in the Sussex University Careers Service, but we will be working in collaboration with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) based on the Sussex campus.

Working with Alumni

Many HE Careers Services now have databases of alumni who are willing to be contacted by undergraduates or to speak to groups of students. At the University of Cambridge 1,200 alumni have volunteered to join their GradLink alumni contact system which allows current students to phone, email, write and meet people for first hand information across a broad variety of career areas.

Graduate Programmes

Graduate Programmes are well-established in many parts of the UK. Often supported by regional project funding, these aim to support the local economy by facilitating the recruitment of graduates in the area.

Case Study – Edinburgh

In the Edinburgh area, Graduates for Growth is a project between the four local HEIs, largely funded by Lothian & Edinburgh Enterprise Limited and supported by CBI Scotland and the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. It provides graduate employment and recruitment advice services for Edinburgh and the Lothians.

Case Study – Wales

In Wales, University Careers Services have contact with HEFCW (HE Funding Council for Wales) which funds more employer related work than the Welsh Development Agency. Funding from HEFCW includes graduate support groups, the Cymru Prosper Wales (CPW) work experience scheme and the Graduate Wales (GW) database which provides a vacancy matching service for students and employers. Currently negotiations are taking place between HE Careers Services and HEFCW over a new Graduate support programme to replace both mentioned above, with over £3.3 million available for each of the next two years to be shared between the eleven HEIs in Wales from both the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the European Social Fund. Regional links are a key feature in Wales driven by the WAG.

2) If you do not have, or would like to strengthen such relationships, what are the main barriers to doing so?

- ***Management and organisational issues. How can businesses and universities best organise themselves in order to benefit from each other's resources? Do the present mechanisms for priority setting, decision-making and funding in the university sector help or hinder business-university collaboration? What changes might encourage collaboration?***

Management and organisational issues

The **Harris Report** (2001) "Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services" emphasised in Recommendations 21 & 36 the **need for HE and Employers to work better together and to ensure that Careers Services were strategically included in this**. Careers Services have a lot to offer in this area but are sometimes overlooked even in institutions where there is really excellent work going on. Work still needs to be done to ensure that Careers Services are involved in the development and implementation of strategy in relation to working with business.

There can be problems with the management style of institutions or the lack of interest in these issues. In some cases there is no perceived incentive or desire at senior level to **strategically manage all the business relationships that exist within the university** to the benefit of all employers, students or the institution itself. The appointment of senior staff to new roles relating to business and enterprise may help change this, but there is still a need to ensure that the knowledge, contacts and expertise of the Careers Service is built into strategic developments at the HE / Business interface.

Often the biggest problems in developing formal strategic links is the **bureaucratic way in which the responsible government bodies and agencies operate, which can cause endless delays and mixed messages**. It may also explain why the most satisfactory links are often the informal ones. However, external funding is clearly crucial to enable HEIs to provide the wide range of necessary services to graduates and the business community.

HEIs are not going to be able to deal with the problem of producing more high quality science and engineering graduates, whether to the specific demands of the labour market or not, until a solution is found to the declining numbers of pupils and their teachers who specialise in the related subjects. However attractive careers for these graduates are made, the issue is more fundamental than at the graduating level. In the meantime, **students on relevant courses could be surveyed for their views on how career paths could be made more appealing**

Despite graduates often having excellent employability skills there remains significant discrimination on the part of some employers in relation to recruiting from new universities.

The large firms are mostly effective in communicating their plans for attracting the 'best talent' to their businesses but most SMEs are not. In fact, discounting projects, communication with SMEs seems to be largely to be non-existent, except in very local circumstances and in situations which demand huge amounts of HEI investment to establish relationships and dialogues. **There is a need for a representative body which could fill this gap at local, regional and national levels**. Chambers of Commerce, RDAs the SSCs might all have a role to play, but there is an obvious need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities and good communication channels. (The constant renaming of such agencies does not help the general confusion, least of all with SMEs whose contacts are sporadic.)

On the one hand government encourages universities to work more closely with SMEs, but then **operate policies and procedures, which restrict the process**, eg. the application of State Aid rules, which limit the support which any small business can receive from many, but not all, publicly funded sources.

Government offices are demanding to know intrusive information from companies, which are co-operating with ERDF funded projects within universities, with the result that companies are refusing to co-operate, and consequently are being lost to the project.

Often business' input to academic Boards is dependent on an individuals interest and goodwill, rather than the businesses commitment/policy. When that individual moves away, the relationship often dies.

Business often appear to see recruitment relationships with universities as a good developmental process for recent graduate recruits, who are then moved on just as a mutually beneficial relationship starts to develop.

A common response to the kind of challenge posed by the Government in this consultation is to set up yet another body to regulate what is going on. It is important that best practice is identified and built on using existing channels and structures, that a clear steer is given to HEIs and to businesses and that a minimum of bureaucracy is created to support this work.

Mechanisms for priority setting, decision-making and funding

It is important to recognise that not all the problems lie in the University sector. There have been huge changes within the sector and many innovative ways found to try to meet the plethora of government objectives, even when these have changed over short periods of time. Universities need to be adequately funded to carry out their core duties and the additional demands made on them by government, in relation to employers and students.

Although HE and business have been encouraged to work together for many years, in the end it is usually designated funding that has changed practice and thinking. The White Paper has proposed extra funding for Knowledge Exchanges in 20 universities but we are concerned about what will happen to the rest. These developments need to take place in every HE institution.

Short-term funding of projects to develop new practice, has too often led to the achievement of short-term goals, rather than the longer term adoption of good practice, which disappears with the skilled staff when the funding ends.

As a result of the proposals in the DfES white Paper, Universities in England are going to be very absorbed in issues around protecting their research base, improving teaching standards and ensuring student access and retention. This does not mean that links with employers are not important, but that employers need to recognise the challenges facing the HE sector and help HEIs to meet their shared aims and needs.

3) A third set of questions relates to how business can attract the best graduates and postgraduates with the skills that they require, especially in technology. Questions include:

- ***Is the quality of graduate recruits satisfactory? Are there any obvious gaps in terms of skills and disciplines?***

Employers who restrict their recruitment to a narrow range of HE institutions and their graduates may be missing out on talented graduates elsewhere.

- ***How do businesses, individually or collectively, communicate their needs for specific scientific or technical skills and for the development of relevant courses in universities?***

Businesses tend to operate at different levels in this context. Large, national or even global graduate recruiters often have a clear strategy of institutional targeting which tends to be driven by perceived quality of graduates and the reputation of the institution. Where recruitment is subject specific, departments rather than whole institutions are targeted. Science and Technology are obvious examples.

The tightening of the graduate recruitment market in recent years has tended to make for even narrower targeting. Global recruiters reducing their UK university "hit list" from 20+ to 10 or so often accompanied by a desire on the part of the business in question to strengthen its relationships with the target universities.

Another set of questions is around quality of graduates and gaps in terms of skills. Careers Services working in new universities are very conscious of the fact that some of their students have really excellent employability skills but that there is significant

discrimination on the part of some employers in relation to recruiting students from new universities. AGCAS is acutely aware of this, and despite acknowledging the right of employers to recruit where they wish, would be grateful if this issue of discrimination could be highlighted. There was significant evidence in relation to this forwarded to the DfES during the Harris Review Consultation exercise.

As indicated earlier, attracting graduates is more problematic for smaller organisations and SMEs in particular which often lack the HR infrastructure and graduate recruitment experience to be "in the know" about connecting with universities. In the experience of AGCAS Services this is an area in which regional collaboration can be very beneficial to all concerned using the HE careers services as the "gateways" the HEIs in a number of regions have been providing collaborative services to employers and particularly SMEs for some time.

- ***How could more attractive career paths for science and technology graduates and postgraduates be developed?***

Careers in science and technology are often seen to be less attractive than those in Law, Finance or other "professions", therefore there is a need to develop a more "professional" ethos in these areas. This includes many factors/ perceptions on pay and conditions of work, responsibility, training and development, variety, etc. which the traditional profession portray more positively.

Long-term contracts of employment are needed to counteract the present insecurity, which is endemic in science.

Many businesses have abandoned costly in-house training schemes, because incentives have been withdrawn. Consequently, the larger businesses no longer train more staff than they require, thus depriving their industry of the skills which smaller businesses cannot afford to provide. Such training is vital for the success of the industry.

- ***What plans does business have to attract the best talent in the future and are the universities made aware of them? If not, what more could be done to facilitate such a dialogue?***

Many thousands of UK organisations, businesses and public sector recruit graduates each year. There are well-established systems for doing so, including the means for employers to market their opportunities. HE Careers Services have long played a central role in these systems and details are provided elsewhere of the range of facilities and services offered. Websites and new on-line systems are also being used extensively to inform potential applicants of opportunities and to enable them to apply easily. A growing issue for HEIs may be that IT allows employers to by-pass them altogether. The latest issue of "Graduate Recruiter" (AGR) reports on the effectiveness of the different mechanisms and media used.

Many well-established graduate recruiters work closely with Careers Services in universities and have benefited from doing so over a number of years. Business needs to work with universities in much the same way as they would with their other suppliers and customers, developing long-term relationships, rather than dipping in and out when it suits them. Businesses need to develop a strategic approach to the recruitment of high level graduate skills in line with management recruitment processes.

It is important that the messages conveyed through these dialogues are both fed back to the appropriate parts of each organisation and then acted on. Feeding back

employers' comments and suggestions from Careers Services' many encounters, need to be fed back formally to the appropriate University committees or groups for consideration and action. These might include groups dealing with Teaching and Learning, Transferable Skills, Contract Research Staff, External / Corporate Liaison Office, Faculty Boards and Course Committees.

4) *The review team will also want to understand whether financial considerations currently help or hinder the relationships between business and universities.*

- **Are there ways in which the present financing arrangements could be made more effective?**
- **Has the introduction of R&D tax credits influenced business demand for research and skills, and if so, how? Are there other means to the same end?**

Present financing arrangements could be made more effective if moved away from short-term, project driven funding which does not recognise the need for continuation of the really good practices which have been developed through such initiatives and are then left to die because of inadequate resources. The damage to service provision and staff morale, and the loss of skilled staff negate the benefits of much good work. New strategic initiatives are important but take time to filter through and stability is required rather endless changes to meet short-term political objectives which sometimes seem to have changed even before they can be implemented.